

## Comparing Marx and Weber

### Assignment:

*Each of you should write a couple of pages, identifying important comparisons between the two theorists. The comparisons should concern important analytical themes or styles of theorizing--the kinds of issues discussed in the "handouts" meant to guide your group papers and those raised in class. You may focus on one comparison or identify several. For each, try to state the issue, indicate why the issue matters, give an account of what is similar and different in how Marx and Weber approach the theme, and provide some analytic interpretation of the theoretical sources and consequences of the differences.*

The following lists all responses to the assignment in the order in which they were posted.

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Danielle Lindemann

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### Marx v. Weber: The Role of Historical Analysis

In our first paper on The Protestant Ethic, my group wrote in our thesis paragraph: "Unlike Marx, Weber does not intend to pursue a path of determinism; instead, the goal of his project is to understand the spirit of capitalism within a historical context." But this statement is not entirely accurate. The difference between Weber's and Marx's theoretical frameworks is not a case of historical versus contemporary analysis. Both theorists pursue diachronic analyses, attempting to understand the connection between modern capitalism and specific historical circumstances.

Weber, writing as an historical sociologist, theorizes in PE that the cultural values embroiled in the American Protestant ethic, as embodied by seventh-century Puritans, accelerated the development of modern capitalism. He traces this ethic into the 18th century, when, exemplified by figures like Ben Franklin, the ethic became stripped of its connection to salvation and the striving for money became "understood completely as an end in itself." (PE, 17) Finally, in Weber's contemporary times, capitalism (divested of its linkage to Protestant values) manifested itself in a compulsory, socially-rooted system from which no one could

escape. The 17th century ascetic protestant, Weber writes, "wanted to be a person with a vocational calling; today we are forced to be." (PE, 123)

Marx's project is similar to Weber's in that, while he does not devote himself to the historical circumstances which have led to capitalism (thus, perhaps, my group's comment about how Marx, unlike Weber, does not concern himself with historical context), he does, like Weber, attempt to understand how modern capitalism has arisen from the capitalism which preceded it. Our group's comment belies the reality that Marx's analysis of capitalism is extremely historical in nature. He discusses the alienated state of modern man via an historical materialistic analysis, theorizing that, throughout history, "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual process in general." (The Marx-Engels Reader, 4) The history of class struggle, further, becomes central to his theory. Marx describes, for instance, the polarization of proletariat, bourgeoisie, and petty bourgeoisie into two distinct groups of workers and capitalists. Under a capitalistic system, "the distinction between capitalist and land-rentier, like that between the tiller of the soil and the factory-worker, disappears and...the whole of society must fall into two classes – the property-owners and the propertyless workers." (The Marx-Engels Reader, 70) Thus, Marx, like Weber, contextualizes the origins of modern capitalism, delineating the historical process by which capitalism has manifested itself in its contemporary form.

The glaring distinction between the two theorists, of course, when it comes to historical analysis, is that Weber asserts that culture catalyzes economic conditions and Marx writes that economic conditions manifest themselves in society and culture. However, to pigeonhole the two theorists merely as espousers of economically- and culturally- driven historical change, respectively, is to obfuscate the nuances within the two theoretical frameworks which render them similar. While it is tempting, for instance, to assert that, to these theorists, we are all merely the result of social and/or economic processes from which we can not escape, it is important to note that both writers inject considerations of the characteristics and emotions of individual human beings into their analyses. Weber, for instance, describes the "unimaginable inner loneliness of the solitary individual" (PE, 59) under the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which ultimately led to the Protestant work ethic as a crystallization of the individual desire to be saved. Marx, too, describes the psychological dimensions of human experience which have catalyzed capitalism. In *Capital*, writing of the individuals who exploit the working class, and providing case studies of workers who have endured such exploitation, Marx humanizes what he terms his "dramatis personae" by endowing them with specific individual

characteristics. (The Marx-Engels Reader, 343) Delineating between the exploitative capitalist and the exploited laborer, Marx writes, "The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but – a hiding." (The Marx-Engels Reader, 343) Thus, while he tends to view history in terms of classes and processes, rather than as a collection of the lives of specific individuals, Marx does, like Weber, ascribe specific human traits to the players in his scenarios. (Along the same lines, it is interesting to note that, while Marx often focuses on the collective rather than the individual, his very writing of "Capital" was an individual act which spawned social change.)

To neither Marx nor Weber are human beings merely automatons, compelled to action by external forces. While it is tempting to view them both merely as theorizers of larger, disparate processes (Marx, economic and Weber, cultural) which drive history, both ascribe psychological motives to the players in their historical scenarios. In short, both theorists pursue diachronic analyses in attempting to understand their contemporary manifestations of capitalism, and human mentality plays into both of these analyses. It is important to point to these similarities within the projects of these two theorists – their use of historical analysis and the humanization of the players in that analysis – so as not to oversimplify the two projects as oppositional strategies for explaining capitalist development.

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Mihaela Serban  
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## Religion and Capitalism in Marx and Weber

Both Marx and Weber are concerned with the origins and development of modern capitalism. For Weber, religion, and specifically Protestantism (Calvinism), is a major, though not exclusive, causal factor in the development of modern capitalism. For Marx, capitalism, like other historical modes of production, is the result of real, material conditions, and religion is part of the super-structure of society (thus rising on a historically-determined material base).

It would seem that for Weber, ideas can create social change, while for Marx, the causal relation is inversed, and they are only the result of material conditions. For Weber, religion can be a force of social change, while for Marx it is necessarily a conservative, status-quo-preserving force.

It may, therefore, appear surprising that Marx and Weber agree on the basic elements of modern capitalism: a rational process of accumulation of wealth/capital (surplus value) for reinvestment, and thus on the basic reproductive features of the

capitalist system. Before attempting to reconcile these two perspectives, it might be helpful to review their respective positions on religion.

Marx starts from understanding God (spirit) as the projection of man's "true" self (reversing Hegel). Man is doubly self-estranged or alienated: in his consciousness and in his labor. For Marx, they are two sides of the same coin, and he is quite explicit on both accounts (pp. 72, 119, 53). He is also explicit in comparing alienation of self (religious) with alienation of labor (pp. 78, 85, 74).

It is thus internally consistent that, just like alienation of labor is crucial for understanding and criticizing capitalism, alienation of self-consciousness plays an equally important part ("the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism" p.53). In this context, religion is defined as "opium of the people" (providing temporary, false relief and keeping them "in their place"), as well as a form of social control (as an expression of the ideas of the dominating classes in a given historical phase) (pp. 53, 145, 28, 14, 54). Either way, religion is dependent on the material base, and it is not an independent force of social change (it is important to note that Marx does not distinguish between or within religions, as this is not important for his argument).

The only place where Marx appears to allow religion a principal, rather than secondary part is in "On the Jewish Question."

Here, Marx defines religion as a particular mode of production (p. 85) and then specifically discusses the impact of Judaism in real life (this is the only religion he singles out). In this discussion, Judaism seems to play a role similar to that played by Weber's Protestantism in the development of capitalism, although not via the work ethic path, but through the emphasis it lays on money (capital) and commerce. In this analysis, the Jewish "spirit", aided by Christianity, seems to play an important part in the development of modern capitalism (pp. 48, 50, 52).

Unlike Marx, Weber assumes and does not attempt to explain the religious instinct; he merely tries to understand how it determines human action [religious action] from the actor's point of view. By excluding other possible explanations, and comparatively analyzing various strands of Christianity, he identifies Protestantism and specifically Calvinism as the root of the capitalist work ethic. The doctrine of predestination, vocation, a methodical life and asceticism (a strict work ethic that requires self-denial), as well as individualism, are all linked together to create a core capitalist ethic.

However, Weber also claims that while these variables explain the origins of capitalism, by now they have lost their initial meaning and purpose, they have become ingrained in the system independently of their religious origins, and thus that the modern capitalist work ethic has become completely separated from its religious context, although it continues to function in the same way ("The Puritan wanted to be a person with a vocational calling; today we are forced to be", p.122).

What do these two perspectives on religion mean for a common definition of capitalism? For both Marx and Weber, religion has a functional value. Weber explains the capitalist class from a psychological perspective (what motivates it), while Marx focuses on the working class. For Weber, religion is a key motivating factor that clarifies the psychology and behavior of the individual capitalist, legitimizes it, and ascribes to it a positive morality. Marx acknowledges the hold that the religious instinct has over individuals, and his "opium of the people" metaphor explains how it affects both the psychology and agency of the individual. As Marx understands religion to be a tool of oppression, it is only natural to ascribe positive morality to the exploited,

and negative morality to the exploiters. Weber helps us understand how the exploiters, far from being intrinsically evil or mere creatures of the system, are in fact individuals who function within clearly delimited spheres of psychology, morality, and agency, and how this contributes to the perpetuation of the system.

Interestingly, both Marx and Weber, albeit for different reasons, end up looking towards societies that either transcend or downplay religion.

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Catherine Bell

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Both Marx and Weber take up the notion of socioeconomic class as one component of their analysis of what they considered the keystone to modern culture and society, modern capitalism. However, the two theorists have different projects in addressing this social category, and therefore have different descriptions of social class that neither contradict nor criticize one another.

In creating his “grand theory,” Marx constructs the notion of class around two poles: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. He suggests that modern capitalism tends to polarize all class relations, folding the unsuccessful petty bourgeoisie in with the proletariat and forcing an ever widening gap between the two class groups. In a historical sense, Marx was aware that the socioeconomic landscape was in fact much more complex; however, this polarization must be understood as functionally necessary to his notion of dialectical materialism and eventual class-based revolution. The existence of other, intermediate class groups was a historical particularity that neither invalidates nor adds insight to his theory of class relations, and is therefore theoretically irrelevant.

Weber, in his later writing on “The Distribution of Power Within the Political Community,” addresses another dimension of class. He does not point out Marx’s historical inaccuracy in identifying a simplified class structure; rather, he complicates the notion of class by differentiating between structures of social status and economic class. He writes, “The economic order merely defines the way in which economic goods and services are distributed and used. Of course, the status order is strongly influenced by it, and in turn reacts upon it.” (927)

This difference can be attributed to a divergence in the underlying questions the two theorists address when focusing on the issue of class. In his construction of a polarized class structure, Marx’s concern is the establishment of an internally coherent description of the relations of capital in the historically specific context of modern capitalism. His task is to describe the foundational economic structures from which other relations were derived. On the other hand, Weber’s project, as it relates to his aforementioned analysis of class, is driven by the question, “How is power organized in modern society?” Here, the focus and scope of Weber’s organizing question is different from Marx’s. He is describing power relations in the context of modern capitalist society, not establishing causality for the relations themselves and the origins of the system within which they exist.

Following this, it can be asserted that Marx’s approach closely follows Hegel’s

conception of the dialectic, constructing a model of history which can be distilled down to a tension of two competing forces. Far from a simplification, Marx's account capitalist relations reveals the complexity of the new measures of value and forms of wealth as they developed under modern capitalism. However, in constructing his theory of capitalism Marx values the establishment of a causally complete abstraction that is an adequate explanation of modern capitalism rather than an accurate description of it.

Weber's work in "The Distribution of Power," and "Bureaucracy," is a theoretical description of a set of power relations, rather than an explanation for them. However, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" is indeed explanatory, positing that the Protestant ethic was a cultural phenomenon of origins independent from capitalism that fostered the development and eventual dominance of this modern economic form. Weber builds a causal account of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and modern capitalism, diverging from Marx's historical materialism not only in his positing of the primacy of culture but also in his rejection of the conclusion of capitalism's inevitable demise. Weber acknowledges a dialectical relationship between culture and economic structure, but does not go so far as to suggest that the embers that nourish capitalism will lead to revolutionary abolition of that very economic structure.

Catherine Bell  
Sociology of Education  
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions  
Steinhardt School of Education

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Jane Jo-Ann Jones

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In comparing Marx and Weber, at first consideration their theoretical views appear to be quite different. When we examine the approach that each author takes to the idea of specialization, however, we can see subtle similarities that make the consequences of their arguments an important point of comparison. While Marx and Weber apply the concept of specialization in very different ways, the implementation and consequences specialization have much in common.

Weber applies the idea of specialization (although he does not refer to it as such) most explicitly in the work "Bureaucracy". Here, Weber informs the reader that for bureaucracy to be successful, it must have certain characteristics. First, there must be a commitment to bureaucratic offices, rather than the individuals who hold those offices. In this respect, the individual loses importance. For Weber, this specialization occurs in the political realm, as the bureaucracy is a governing structure.

In Marxist theory, the division of labor has characteristics that are similar to those of specialization as explicated in Weber's analysis. The first similarity is not particular to the division of labor, but instead

generalizable to Marx's general theory. The individual is not important; instead his labor gives him value. One could say that capitalism, as a system, values the labor of the individual more than it values the individual. Here, the similarity between Marx and Weber is clear. In neither situation is man valued for his self worth. Instead, his value is contingent on what his labor. In "Bureaucracy", this work is the fulfillment of bureaucratic obligations, on the part of a bureaucratic official. For Marx, work is the labor performed by an individual on a daily basis.

In *The Critique of Capitalism*, Marx discusses how the division of labor in factories, especially in the use of machinery, detaches all intellect from manual labor (409). In "Bureaucracy"; Weber describes the bureaucratic official as a person who, while having expertise in his field, is required to follow rules and regulations. Additionally, he is educated to be a bureaucrat – taught certain lessons that enable him to be specialized, so that he can carry out his work with the highest level of efficiency. His education is dictated by the mandates of bureaucracy, just as the worker's education (of how to use that machinery) in Marx's factory is dictated by the mandates of capitalism, namely surplus value, or profit. In neither instance is the individual permitted to express his creativity, nor is there a synthesis between his intellect and the labor that he performs.

In both situations we can see that the individual becomes alienated from the work that he performs, although to different extents. For a bureaucratic official, awards can be given in the sense of promotions, which is something that Marx does not talk about in his theory. Yet, in the daily operation of bureaucracy, we see that there are striking resemblances to a capitalist system, which Weber concedes when he states that "Today, it is primarily the capitalist market economy which demands that the official business of public administration be discharged precisely, unambiguously, continuously, and with as much speed as possible ("Bureaucracy", 974). While Weber's capitalist system is obviously not identical to Marx's, it is important to note that in both systems the emphasis on efficiency, continuity, and rigidity is sought even at the expense of forsaking the individual.

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Melissa Velez  
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While both Weber and Marx are interested in examining similar societal structures through historical analysis, each has a different way of positioning his discoveries, particularly in terms of the future. Specifically, Weber focuses on a contextual-historical theoretical

approach that shies away from making strong predictive claims based on his analysis. On the other hand, Marx makes sweeping predictions based on his research. What follows is a brief review of how each author treats his historical analysis in the context of his theory and the future condition of society.

In *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber outlines a theory which follows the "spirit of capitalism" from predeterministic Calvinist ideology to its more modern rational state. However, throughout the work, he is loathe to state a direct causal relationship between Calvinist ideology and the spirit of capitalism. Instead, he focuses our attention on "elective affinities," which, in certain contexts, are conducive to creating the spirit of capitalism. In other words, Weber is interested in showing how, historically, certain values within certain contexts can produce an outcome.

In the same vein, the selected readings on "Bureaucracy" and "Class, Status, and Party" are more descriptive than predictive. In "Bureaucracy," Weber discusses, again, the conditions that have an elective affinity towards the creation and maintenance of a bureaucracy. Likewise, in "Class, Status, and Power," Weber describes a social structure of the distribution of power. However, in both selections, the theories he sets forth are more concerned with describing a social context and arguing how certain contexts are mutually beneficial to each other's survival (e.g. capitalism and bureaucracy). When Weber does touch upon the consequences of, for example, the bureaucracy, his predictions stress the context. He writes, "The consequences of bureaucracy depend therefore upon the direction which the powers using the apparatus give to it" (989). He is reluctant to predict outcomes of a social system because the consequences are the product of many contexts existing at a certain point in time.

Perhaps the closest Weber gets to being deterministic is during his discussion of the "iron cage." At the end of his work, Weber discusses how the modern spirit of capitalism has become "the pursuit of gain?completely unchained and stripped of its religious-ethical meaning [and] associated with purely competitive passions" (124). He writes that this "competitive passion" is passed down from capitalist to capitalist and becomes so innate that the capitalist himself cannot break free from the spirit (and possibly doesn't even know he is in the "cage"). While Weber may imply that future generations will fall victim to the "cage," his discussions never explicitly address this. Instead, he focuses more on current observations of the phenomenon (e.g. in the United States). The iron cage may be presented as a possibility for the future, but it is left as precisely that, a possibility. He writes, "No one any longer knows who will live in this steel-hard casing and whether entirely new prophets or a mighty rebirth of ancient ideas and ideals will stand at the end of this

prodigious development" (124). Again, Weber is hesitant to be too deterministic because future outcomes depend on too many contexts to predict.

The selected readings of Marx's works, on the other hand, have a clear deterministic quality that is not present in Weber's works. Although Marx also uses contextual historical analysis to research capitalism, he goes further in examining and critiquing capitalist society. Specifically, Marx focuses on the inevitable social revolution stemming from the conflicts between "the social productive forces and the relations of production," or, the clash between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (5). Because class conflict is central to his prediction of social revolution, Marx does focus on a multi-causal historical analysis as Weber does. Instead, he focuses on the economic historical context that leads up to creation of the two classes. Once this relationship has been established, Marx's predictions for the future are rooted in the economy without deference to other possible contextual influences. In fact, Marx's views his predictions for the future as so inevitable that he write extensively on the solution to the problem (communism).

Although it is true that much of societal structures are rooted in the economy, one wonders if Marx's theories are too limited in scope because they do not acknowledge enough other influential factors. In this sense, Marx is very different from Weber. While both review and recognize the importance of historical contexts, Weber's analysis is much wider in its scope. Because Weber's research shows how many contexts must exist at a particular time for an outcome to occur, he seems to realize the futility of being too deterministic. It is difficult to make predictions for the future when one's research shows how many contexts must work together at a certain time to produce an outcome. However, it would have been interesting to know what Weber thought (aside from the "iron cage") about the future of our society, however qualified that prediction would have to be. In this sense it seemed that Marx was on the other end of the spectrum. Although Marx also uses a historical analysis to arrive at his theories, his research was uni-causal, focusing mostly on the economy. From the results of his research, he created a deterministic theory rooted in the economy. However, these theories are contingent upon the idea that society will follow the same economic trajectory that it was on when Marx was writing. However, we know now from history that society changed and adapted to capitalism in such a way that class conflict has not yet resulted in a revolution.

In sum, while both Marx and Weber employed a historical contextual analysis to arrive at their theories, Weber's theories were more descriptive and Marx's theories were more deterministic. However, as

reviewed, there are strengths and flaws to each approach.

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Miodrag Stojnic

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Weber and Marx differ in the phenomena they are trying to explain. While Weber on the one side tries, to explain what is the distribution of power in society, what is the organization of rational authority like, or how a particular form of capitalism appeared in Western Europe, Marx tries to answer questions such as what is history and what are the forces behind it.

This allows Marx to develop an all encompassing theory of basic forces in history, particular characteristics of each historical stage and the future development based on the dynamics of these forces. Once Marx has realized that history is made by man through his material production, and that each historical stage is driven by interplay and contradiction of its particular means of production and social relations of production he can state what is the imminent path the future development of that stage will look like. This is why capitalism with its exploitation, drive for reduction of costs, and throat-cut competition will eventually end in an unsolvable crisis.

Although Weber couldn't come up with such a grand theory with his questions he also paid a smaller price in terms of correspondence of his theory to empirical verification. The reason lies in the fact that he didn't have to make such great abstractions as Marx did and he avoided making statements on human nature on which Marx's theory is relies. For example while Marx assumes a free market with free competition Weber sees status groups as disturbing market with monopolization of goods. He also doesn't see society as polarizing, or that conflict necessarily follows from the economic situation of individuals.

Actually Weber's disagrees with Marxism on the issue of class and this is in part a consequence of the degree of abstraction. Basic division of people who meet in the market is being propertied and propertyless. Division is followed based on the nature of property one owns or services one offers in case he is without property. From this follows that class situations of a number of people in the market are relatively diversified and so should be their economic interests. Weber's definition of class interest is accordant to this implication. According to him class interest is a "factual direction of interests following with a certain probability from the class situation for a certain average of those people subjected to the class situation." (p 929) In line with this he claims that an individual will decide based on his specific class situation and specific economic interest that follows from it whether or not he will join a certain social action(p 929). This is obviously in contrast to Marx

conception of two classes which have inherent conflicting interests. For Weber class situation can lead to similar reactions of people that share it but by no means would that lead to a revolution. Class action would occur when real conditions and the results of class situation would be clearly recognizable "only then the contrast of life chances can be felt not as an absolutely given fact to be accepted." However usually class antagonisms are worst among those that directly participate as opponents in price wars instead of those that actually benefit from exploitation. Actually Weber opposes this to Marxism stating "this fact must not lead to that kind of pseudo-scientific operation with the concepts of class and class interests which is so frequent these days and which has found its most classic expression in the statement of a talented author, that the individual may be in error concerning his interests but that the class is infallible about his interests." (p 930) However from the readings we have done in the Classical Social Theory we never find out why is class important to Weber, why property and its nature on one side and service and its nature on the other are relevant. Weber stays at a descriptive level that nevertheless does well in empirical verification.

Marx and Weber also differ in the method they used in their work. Marx was using a specific kind of dialectics termed historical materialism while Weber used a historical comparative method. Each of these methods provided different support for their theorizing. Historical materialism with its interplay and contradictions between means of production and social relations of production, and ensuing class conflicts allowed Marx to explain dynamics of a particular historical stage, the evolutionary character of history, and make predictions. Historical comparative method as used by Weber in the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism allowed him to eliminate some other possible explanations and pin down the cause for the form of capitalism in Western Europe through comparing different religions and regions.

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Leslie-Ann Bolden  
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#### The Use of Religion in the Growth of Capitalism:

Marx and Weber identify religion as critical to the growth of capitalism, but differ on the effects that this 'instrument' has on the individual man and the society at large. In his critique of Hegel, Marx showed that man created religion and it (religion) reflects all the unrealized hopes and dreams that man wanted to accomplish or manifest in himself, nature, and society with other men but is unable to do so because of the power structure in which he (man) lived. Religion was thus created as an

alternative to this lack of fulfillment and personal control. It was then used to assuage or rather numb the feelings of alienation and loss of human consciousness that he had because he had lost touch with himself. Man, therefore, created an inner world for himself through religion and was able to continue existing in the false consciousness of the outer world because of the 'false satisfaction' created by religion. Religion became his 'opium,' removing him from his reality and giving him an alternate universe in which to exist (p.53-55) that prevented him from taking action to improve his situation.

In light of this situation, Marx contended that the conditions were ripe for the establishment of a capitalist structure. The bourgeoisie was thus able to use religion to its advantage because it could portray the poverty and suffering that the proletariat experienced in this life as just a 'stage' that he (the proletariat) was passing through. It appropriated religious doctrine and used it as a shield to mask the injustice that it meted out to the proletariat. Biblical sayings were made popular by the Clergy -- who served the interests of the bourgeoisie who supported them (Clergy) materially and politically -- such as, (paraphrased) "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven," trying to convince the poor that their suffering and exploitation experienced in this life would be rewarded in the afterlife. Marx saw religion as a tool that separated man (the proletariat) from himself as it protected the cause and interests of the bourgeoisie to enjoy this present material life.

Conversely, Weber saw religion as a positive instrument of capitalism. To Weber, the principle that it, religion, and in particular Protestant religion advanced was the wellspring from which capitalism grew. It was religion -- and in particular Calvinism -- that provided a haven from the uncertainty of entering heaven in the afterlife and by showing man that by working hard one could manifest to the world that one was among the saved. He believed that it was the belief held by this segment of the population -- that hard work and asceticism would bring material rewards both in this life and the afterlife -- was adopted by the general population, transformed itself to material interests and developed into capitalism. Therefore, for Weber, capitalism was not imposed upon the ordinary man by the superstructure but came from him and is therefore a reflection of him.

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Michelle Lynn

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Marx and Weber share the observation that individuals have become more specialized in their work. In Marx's theory, this specialization is related to the division of labor required for an efficient capitalist economy, and it leads to the laborer's alienation from his work. This



of which have lasting implications as organizing concepts in what we've come to term 'modern society.' In our reading of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, we followed Weber through exploration of the question: why did modern capitalism take unique hold in the West? Next, in *Bureaucracy and Class, Status, Party* we examined the questions: What are the origins of power and authority and how are they consolidated and legitimated in modern society? Next, in our readings of Marx, we took up broad questions of production, first exploring what's different about capitalist economic production from earlier forms of production (feudalism, slavery) and what social forms result from capitalism's associated social production. Finally, in our look at *Capital*, we've honed in on the specific inner workings of capitalistic production, asking: How does the system work and what are its effects on laborers and capitalists? Underlying each of these questions are fundamental questions that [one would hope] are common to all theorists trying to make social theory: How do people act together? How do they organize and divide themselves? What are the implications for these-politically, economically, and in broader terms, socially?

Taking as a given the existence of capitalism (setting aside Weber's theory of why modern capitalism took special root in the West), Weber looks at how modern people in democracy and capitalism organize themselves in *Class, Status, Party*. Classes, he asserts, are composed of people with the same life chances for obtaining economic power. Status groups, quaintly thought of in contemporary terms as organized around identity politics, according to Weber are those groups with a degree of social power from honor rather than economic means (though they may also have economic power) and who organize differently around commonly regarded social actions. Parties, then, are those groups that organize themselves around commonly-held political interests and beliefs. Here the economic and political systems in which the organizing forces are embedded provide a backdrop-they are prerequisites for this sort of organization. In Marx's answer to the same question of how modern people organize themselves, he writes only of class interest. For Marx, class, limned uniquely by the light cast on it by the dominant mode of production (capitalism) is indeed sufficiently bright to reveal all of what humans become under capitalism-people whose economic, political, and other social interests are manifest in their class associations.

Weber's discussion of class, status, and party could be thought of as broadening Marx's theory of class, showing how, within a capitalistic democracy there is space to associate along different lines than purely economic ones. If searching for empirical data to test such a theory in this age of advanced capitalism, where would one find it? Where do political associations occur that are not also economic? What is the source of social honor? Does it today exist separate from economic power? Marx suggests, in bold terms, that capitalism as a system wraps political

and economic characterizations of society into one, and this, rather than precluding organization along extra-class lines, simply blurs any line between the two that existed in pre-capitalist modes of production. Relationships within classes are all mediated by capitalism, just as workers in a strawberry field might organize to demand a living wage (economic) or an end to harmful pesticide use (political), and as disgruntled Orange County Libertarians would organize to oust their governor (political) because they are offended by outrageous taxation of their automobile dependency (economic, social). At this core level, it would seem that Marx and Weber's theories of how people organize themselves are not, in the end, so terribly different. While Weber's theories depend on capitalism and democracy, they might be thought of as more comparative at their root, while Marx's theories are firmly planted in a pure, material analysis of modern relationships.

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Amy LeClair

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From reviewing the readings, papers and class notes from the past four weeks I have realized that what is still unclear and what questions are unanswered regarding Marx's and Weber's theories is far greater than what I do know. Consequently, what follows is more a series of questions than a coherent analysis or cohesive summary.

Each week we are urged to find the meta-question that is driving the theory. In his writings on bureaucracy, Weber was asking the question "how is power organized in modern society?". While this may not be the question driving Marx's theory of capitalism, he also provides a theory about the organization of power in modern society. For Weber, power is organized in the form of bureaucracy. The real power lies not in the position one holds, however, but between the positions. In other words, an individual only has power relative to others in the bureaucratic system. Similarly, for Marx power is also relative. He defines the class divisions on the basis of property (the have's vs. the have-not's), but power is assessed based on an individual's relation to the means of production. Both theories look at the way power is organized within institutions. For Weber, it's the social institution of bureaucracy that organizes power; whereas for Marx, power is organized by the economic institution of capitalism.

In last week's big debate over "agency" (whatever that means) and its place in Marx's theory of capitalism we came to view agency as a variable rather than something that gets answered once and for all. Thinking in terms of variables, what other aspects of Marx and Weber's theories have

we possibly mis-categorized as weaknesses in the theory which might be better understood as room for fluctuations of certain variables?

In the first week reading Marx, both groups cite Marx's comment: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (4)." If we were to reframe the question of agency in terms of determinism, how deterministic is Marx's theory? Weber talks about the "iron cage" of capitalism and also about the difficulties of dismantling bureaucracy once it has been established. Can we categorize these theories as deterministic? If so, is either author more deterministic than the other? It is important to analyze theories in these terms?

Finally, we said in class one week that we saw in Weber's theory one of the first attempts to theorize identity politics. Does Marx dabble in identity politics at all? In the first week of reading on Marx he wrote extensively about human nature and the impact of the capitalist system on human nature (namely alienation). Conversely, does Weber give us a theory of human nature? How does the meaning of this term vary for the two authors? More generally, how divergent are these two theories? What is most useful in each theory for understanding the organization of power in modern society?

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Stacey (Tey) Meadow  
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### The Centrality of Alienate(ing) Labor in Marx and Weber

Both Weber and Marx's constructions of Capitalist society have complex implications for what the role of labor is in man's life and identity. Though labor occupies very different places in each theorist's constructions of capitalism, arising out of different productive and restrictive forces, produced by different social interests and achieving different ends, in both cases, man's alienation from his own work is a central fixture of his existence in capitalist society.

For Marx, the notion of labor carries with it a central significance. He cites "production" as a mode of self-expression (150). Though there may be some disagreement over both what precisely constitutes production (labor? knowledge? the physical product?) and how reductive Marx is when it comes to aligning labor/production with the expression of humanity, nonetheless, production and labor place centrally in his discussions of man's increased alienation from his work, in the capitalist context. Marx further centralizes his concept of labor in the division between what he terms free

and unfree labor. He equates the rise of unfree labor with the rise of capitalism, problematizing the rise of work relationships that decrease the individual's control over the means and circumstances of production. This is an over-simplification of Marx's theory, and what he is really talking about is an implicit series of comparisons, labor vs pre-labor, freedom vs various levels of social or actual controls. Important to his entire construct, however, is this idea of the centrality of man's labor in his self-concept and life, and the ways in which systematized marketplaces impinge on the full expression of man, through regulation of the conditions of his labor.

For Weber, it would seem that religion occupies the place of centrality in constructing man's identity that his work and production did for Marx. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber places the set of social controls over the historical evolution of a capitalist economy in the ideology of religion. Ultimately, this aids in the characterization of labor as not an expression of anything inherent in man or his identity, but rather as a means to proving his predestination - a thing alienated entirely from the concept of the labor itself and its product. Both become means of acting out religiously motivated expectations, hoping to reap economic benefits, not for their own sake (as Marx would have it) but rather as part of an ideal of asceticism.

Ironically, though the reasons underlying the motivation to partake in capitalist economy differ for Marx and Weber, the results of such participation don't seem to look all that different. In both cases the primary result is alienation. Marx's concept of alienation from work producing a collective of men who are unfree to control this most basic element of self-expression looks much like the ideal of lonely asceticism Weber describes. Ultimately both depict the capitalist economy as a network of isolated and alienated laborers, for whom their own work product has little meaning inherent to the work itself.

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Michela Bowman  
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## Classical Sociological Theory

After four weeks spent with Weber and Marx, I find myself returning to the question that was intentionally complicated for us by the sequence of our readings. That is, whether Weber's understanding of modern, capitalist society might be read as an answer to Marx's theoretical framing of the same society. It is not simply that I read Weber as a calculated challenge to

Marx's materialistic account of history, but rather that, regardless of intention, there is a great deal in Weber's description of what capitalism is and the causal forces responsible for its emergence and success that might be viewed either to compliment Marx's theories, or challenge them. It seems Marx's and Weber's theoretical framing of many of the same social phenomena raise difficult questions for each about the other.

One of the most persistent questions we had as a class about Marx – both in regard to his description of the impact of a society's economic structure on individual lives, and his description of the progress of history as shaped by material necessity - was whether Marx omitted a role for human agency in this account. While we did not agree entirely on the extent of this omission, nor on its significance, the class expressed a general perception that the economic determinism central to Marx's theoretical framework minimized the role of human agency in the story of societal change over time.

Turning back to Weber raises an obvious question. Does Weber's description of the causal forces that gave rise to capitalism challenge this omission by Marx? Does Weber's explanation of the emergence of capitalism accommodate a greater role for individual agency? On the one hand, there is something intuitively more flexible and contingent about Weber's theory. In PE, he describes modern capitalism as a product of a very particular religious ethic, and his account of the manner in which individuals responded to religious doctrine, both psychologically and behaviorally adapted to beliefs that posed something like existential challenges, suggests that Weber saw at least some role for individual agency in his account.

However, we approached Weber as the class's first example of sociological theory. It may have preceded the emergence of sociology as a recognized discipline, but we understood Weber to be doing sociological theory. One of the characteristics of Weber's writing that makes it sociological theory is that he does attempt to locate the causes of a social phenomenon, and, from that, make predictions for the future. In doing so, it seems he is forced to sacrifice some of the unpredictability that accompanies an account of change that is contingent on individual agency. The predictive power of his theory would unravel were his conclusion merely that certain people at a certain time happened to respond in a certain way to religious teachings, and that they might have responded quite differently.

If we accept that, like Marx, Weber gives an account of history that is at least to some degree deterministic, it seems possible to approach Weber's theoretical account of capitalism not as a challenge to Marx, but merely as an account of forces that gave rise to capitalism with a level of detail that did not interest Marx. In some respects, Marx and Weber describe capitalism similarly. They both see progress in it. They both see a highly structured, rational system. And they both, to varying degrees, perceive it as an oppressive force. Finally, they both see the potential for emancipation from capitalism. One might argue that while Marx was not particularly interested in the micro-level story of the adoption of capitalism by the bourgeoisie, Weber's examination of this story does not necessarily run afoul of the general materialist tenor of Marx's macro-level account.

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Ashley Mears  
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Weber and Marx seem to be asking much different questions about our modern world. While both point to capitalism as the distinctive characteristic in the transition from traditionalism to

modernity, they each approach the issue with different epistemological aims. Weber and Marx must abstract the issue of individual agency in order to construct broader theories of how individuals are organized into larger systems.

When examining capitalism, Weber seems to be asking, "What motivates people to act a certain way?" His empirical observation is capitalist activity, primarily among the middle class, and he wants to figure out how this capitalism came into being. He is searching for subjective meaning behind individual actions, and he then links individuals to a generality. Weber seems to take an existential approach to sociology. He simply wants to understand how things are. For Weber, theories are tools to help us understand the world.

Marx, however, is ready for a battle, and for him, theories are weapons of change. When examining capitalism, Marx seems to be asking two questions, easily categorized here based on his development as a theorist. Young Marx wants to know what effects the capitalist system has upon the individual worker. Old Marx is much more interested in establishing a theory of how capitalism works (and how it will inevitably fail), never mind so much the lived experience of the workers. Both the early and the later works of Marx take a far more normative position than Weber. That is, Marx wants to understand how things ought to be. For him, theories should help us change the world.

Old Marx parallels Weber by reducing the complexities of the capitalist system in order to draw up a broader theory. That is, Marx allows for abstractions to represent reality, and it is acceptable that some of his concepts do not fully depict reality. In this sense, it is as if Marx is drawing upon an "ideal type" of capitalism in order to draw conclusions. Similarly, Weber draws upon an ideal type of bureaucracy to understand how rules are organized in modern society.

Weber and Marx both seem to treat individuals as receptors of systems. Back to the old structure-versus-agency issue: Weber regards the psychological phenomena of anxiety and worldly asceticism as a cause of capitalist activity. On the other hand, Marx deems capitalist activity as the cause of alienation. Now back to Weber, who explains capitalism and bureaucracy are causes of our inevitable disenchantment within an "iron cage." Weber seems to reject Marx's submissive treatment of the individual by breaking away from class determinism; Weber considers other factors that could account for behavior, such as status membership. Yet it seems individuals can get trapped within the irrationality of rules in Weber's bureaucracy just as workers are trapped within Marx's abstract capitalism.

Perhaps both Marx and Weber skirt the individual agency issue due to their sociological objectives. Weber wants to use theory as a means to understand how things are and how they came into existence. He examines the origins and nature of capitalism. Marx wants to use theory to change how things are. He examines the nature of capitalism and how it should instead be. For both theorists, individual subjective orientations are condensed into general concepts. This is not to say that individual experiences do not matter, but larger abstractions can form conclusions without them.

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Robert Weide

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- Weber argument is based in religion; Marx's argument is based in logic. Weber's analysis examines how the history of the protestant movements changed the mind-set of the people to produce a capitalist economy. Marx's analysis logically argues that capitalism is to the detriment of the majority of the people.
- Weber's concept of work as vocational calling contrasts sharply with Marx's view of the worker. Marx believes the worker should only have to work to provide for himself and should realize and enjoy the fruits of his own labor. Weber's analysis asserts that Protestants are bound to labor, as a religious duty and can not enjoy the fruits of the labor they perform because to do so would be sinful.
- In Weber's analysis, the worker is seen as being concerned with the after life, and not with their worldly life. Marx does not consider the after life and focuses his concentration on having a better life for workers at the present.
- Marx discusses the role of money and wages in a capitalist economy. Weber keeps his focus at the religious motivation of workers.
- Weber's analysis attributed to profit a positive moral position in the protestant ethic because it meant that one was not sinfully enjoying their wealth, rather saving it and living a life without luxury. Marx's analysis attributed to profit a negative moral position because it represented the labor that had been appropriated from the worker by the capitalist resulting in his alienation.
- Weber argues that working in a capitalist economy is good for the worker because it gives him some peace of mind in that he may be going to heaven. Marx argues that working in a capitalist society is detrimental to the worker because it strips away his humanity and leaves him with barely enough to subsist on.
- Clearly, ascetic protestant religion convinces workers to accept their condition and cooperate with the capitalist system, working hard while not questioning their lot in life. Marxism encourages workers to realize their meager and untenable position in the capitalist system and therefore to resist and form a revolution against that system.
- Marx divides the people in a capitalist society in to two classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Weber makes no such class distinction.
- Both Marx and Weber believe that the worker is trapped within the capitalist system, however Marx offers a way out of it, revolution.
- Both theories still apply today I think, though neither is exclusively applicable. One can see how the protestant ethic is still present in the conscience of many Americans who attach moral worth to hard work. On the other hand, the Marxist theory of exploitation is still valid as an explanation for many social phenomenon where one segment of society oppresses and takes advantage of another.

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Deirdre O'Sullivan

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Marx and Weber both sought to answer questions about the modern world – what is it like? Why is the modern world the way it is? For Marx, the answer, though not as simple as it may appear here, was that the world is the way it is because of economics; the economics of a society form the base, or foundation, upon which all else is built (law, politics, culture, ideology). Weber instead saw the interrelationship of various factors (religion, politics, economics, culture), their “elective affinity” or mutuality, as the explanation for social phenomena. Weber rejected the search for a primal cause of complex social action and refuted that all historical circumstances could be reduced to an economic explanation.

It is in their perceptions of the nature of the world where Marx and Weber are most distinct from one another, though both do see capitalism at the center of the modern world. Marx’s world is one of class struggle; the needs, interests and desires of the working class and the owners of the means of production are always at odds. It is this class struggle which ultimately, and in conjunction with other forces, will lead to the implosion of capitalist society. Class struggle is the catalyst for change.

Weber does not see the economy as the only influence over the organization of power. He refutes the idea that interests are shared because of membership in the same class, just as he refutes the idea of a national, unified character. Weber sees inherent conflicts not just between classes, but within them. He emphasizes that it is individuals who aggregate as a group, and we cannot ignore what each brings to the whole. Weber seems to view the world as one in which interests are conflicting and interdependent, with none more basic or important than others.

Marx is often critiqued for failing to make any room for agency. He seems to imply that the push of capitalism is such that there is an inevitability inherent in it; there is a drive on the part of capitalists that is inescapable (though one can say that by ascribing moral values to the actions of capitalists, Marx is attributing some agency to them), which forces the workers into a passive and endless cycle of alienation and working for low wages that barely cover the cost of subsistence. On an individual basis there is little opportunity for increased knowledge and the resulting increase in agency. However, Marx does see collective action as the path for workers to realize their agency.

Weber, in the alternative, focuses on the rational, purposive actions which define capitalism. The spirit of modern economic life is connected with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism. Guided by religious values, individuals make systematic, reasoned decisions which change the orientation of their actions such that they further the aims of modern capitalism.

However, Weber comes to share Marx’s perception of the “iron cage” of capitalism. For Weber, the spirituality which was the driving force of modern capitalism in the beginning is forgotten; man finds himself caught in technical and economic conditions which he cannot escape and does not understand. Both Marx and Weber see the falsehoods of liberalism and the alienation of people from their actions and social relations. Both problematize the influence of the market economy on the actions and spirit of individuals.

Clearly each theorist must be taken on his own terms, but a comparison of the two, who share common questions, allows for a more thorough analysis of each. One need not necessarily

declare affinity with one or the other; both have much to offer.

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Sarah Kaufman

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Sorry for this rather late edition.

After reviewing notes and readings, I am left with two related questions related to Marx and Weber's theories of modern society.

First, I am interested in further understanding the implications of Weber's theory of the structure of bureaucracy as it complicates our understanding of power in the modern society. For Weber, bureaucracy is central to understanding how power is organized. As we discuss, he asserts that the existence of a bureaucracy does not depend on a specifically democratic or capitalist society, though those two conditions are conducive to the smooth running of the bureaucratic machine. The implication here is that bureaucracy is an "empty form," able to propel the power of any political hierarchy. If bureaucracy does not depend on a specific political form, does it, for Weber, have power in and of itself? Can we reconcile the existence of an "empty form" with a material production of history, even a modified one via Weber? On the other hand, would a Marxist framework of materialist history fundamentally alter our understanding of the bureaucratic form?

Second and related, I am curious about the concept of the "machine" in both Weber and Marx. For Marx, the machine can be used in one of two ways. First, it represents "congealed labor" under capitalism. The capitalist invests in a machine as an alternative to human labor, and must adjust upkeep costs accordingly. In this scenario, the machine represents competition and indeed a decrease in the wage for the proletariat. This type of discourse is present in today's increasingly technological society; workers are often pitted against machine as competitors in a single market. On the other hand, Marx does not lament the development of technology. As we discussed, there is room for the production of machines in his utopic society, as long as they serve the needs of the proletariat. For Weber, a different type of "machine" also plays prominently in his theory of power in the modern society. Bureaucracy itself is described as a machine that functions on and perpetuates rationality. In this way, man becomes machine-like. What are the implications for these two different views of man's relationship with machines? Is Weber's theory of bureaucracy really a lament of modern man's rationality? Or is there a potential even here to control the machine and subject it to the (non-rational?) uses of man? How can a worker today both compete with a

machine and be concerned about being less machine-like, less propelled by the rational character of bureaucracy?

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